Inés Ordiz Alonso-Collada

Environmental Apocalypse and Uncanny Technology: Gothic Visions of the Future in Three Mexican Literary Dystopias.

The reality of the production of literature that follows a non-mimetic code in Latin America is definitely a complex one. With the exception of Magical Realism, a mode of writing considered native to the territory and, therefore, respected and reinforced because of its necessary connection to (and acceptance of) the magic dimension of Latin American reality, the critics generally show a consistent lack of interest in narratives belonging to other forms of "the unusual". However, ignoring the great complexity of the several shapes that the "literary extraordinary" can take in the diverse fictions of Latin America, implies disregarding a great deal of hybrid fictions containing essential (yet distorted) reflections of the multifaceted reality of the territory.

There are indeed several fictions that conform to a Magical Realist code; however, the narratives belonging to the fantastic genre, the Gothic, and science fiction should not be overlooked. We can think of these modes of representation as establishing an essential relationship towards a higher concept of non-mimetic literature that encompasses all of them, in a theory similar to the one presented by Rosemary Jackson:

> It could be suggested that fantasy is a literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge. Fantasy provides a range of possibilities out of which various combinations produce different kinds of fiction in different historical situations. Borrowing linguistic terms, the basic model of fantasy could be seen as a language, or *langue*, from which its various forms, or *paroles,* derive. Out of this model develops romance literature or 'the marvellous' (including fairy tales and science fiction),

> 'fantastic' literature (including stories by Poe, Isak Dinesen, Maupassant, Gautier, Kafka, H. P. Lovecraft) and related tales of abnormal psychic states, delusion, hallucination, etc. (7)

The modes of writing included in this higher conception of the fantastic are, especially in postmodern times, necessarily hybrid. In Lucie Armitt's words, fantasy is "constantly overspilling the very forms it adopts, always looking, not so much for escapism but certainly to escape the constraints that critics … always and inevitably impose upon it" (3). The hybridization of the different discourses of fantasy is directly connected with what Gary Wolfe has labelled "post-genre fantastic," or the essential mélange of horror, Gothic fiction and the recent "dark fantasy", that so well represents a confused (and confusing) contemporary reality marked by "globalized flows, strange interpretations and simultaneities" (Luckhurst 33). "Fantasy", "post-genre fantastic", "the literature of the unusual"; whatever the term we use to describe this postmodern crossbreed monster, it is already a reality of western literature in general, and of Latin American fictions in particular.

It is not my intention to offer a detailed examination of all the different modes of the literary extraordinary in the Latin American territory, but rather to narrow down the scope of my analysis to the Gothic resources used in Mexican contemporary science fiction. I will mainly be focusing on the way in which this combination reproduces a mixed reality which, as the country's fictions, navigates between the preservation of a native identity, the recollection of a pre-Hispanic past and the acknowledgement of the overwhelming power of globalization.

Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado, in his anthology of Mexican science fiction, asserts that the study of this mode in Mexico necessarily brings along a "double marginality" (Ordiz 1045; Fernández Delgado 17) generated by the unconventionality of the genre in a country not traditionally associated with it. Adding the Gothic to the equation might be, then, exploring a path three times marginalized, but also deeply rooted in the popular cultural imagination of the

country. The fictions I will be taking into account are, not surprisingly, intrinsically hybrid. As Rachel Haywood Ferreira points out, not only is SF a genre with "nebulous borders", but Latin American SF shows a "strong propensity to form hybrids with neighbouring genres" (8). A Gothic perspective implies a study of the points of intersection between both genres, which are defined by Fred Botting as "dark and disturbing, obscure regions, populated by terrors and horrors that knowledge has failed to penetrate or control" (131).

As if these types of fictions were not enough of a muddle, we also need to take into account that the Gothic fictions of the 20th and 21st century commonly set off in two directions, conveying both a globalized reality and a specific set of cultural fears. As Glennis Byron suggests in her article "Global Gothic", the reality of contemporary forms of terror necessarily depends upon this universalization of culture: "the literature and film of different countries are feeding off each other to produce new forms of Gothic that reveal the increasing cross-cultural dynamics of the globalized world" (373). Also, "[a]s the global thrives on producing the local, commodifying it, and marketing it, so contemporary global Gothic increasingly appropriates and commodifies local or regional folklores" (374). The result of this dependent relationship between the specifically cultural and the global results in a type of narrative addressed both to local and universal audiences.

This dual feature of the global Gothic acquires a special interest in a territory which has such a love-hate relationship with the United States, the ultimate "giant" of globalization. Addressing this type of cultural colonization, the younger generations of Latin American writers seem to propose an acceptance of the new power of globalization and its necessary connection to the contemporary reality of the continent. In the prologue of the 1996 book *McOndo,*[1] Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez state the following:

[1] By the use of the word "McOndo," the authors introduce a wordplay referencing both Macondo (the fictional town described by Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) as something distinctly Latin American, and McDonald's as a product of globalization.

> Our McOndo country is bigger, polluted and overpopulated, with motorways, subways, cable TV and slum areas. In McOndo we have McDonald's, Mac computers and blocks of flats, as well as huge malls and 5-star hotels built with laundered money. [2] (15)

The younger generation of Latin American authors breaks with the idea of Magical Realism as the quintessential reflection of the reality of the continent and starts proposing a number of fictions which, addressing specific cultural concerns, open themselves up to other traditions.

The narratives that I intend to explore combine a postmodern homage to the Anglo masters of the science fiction genre, pre-Hispanic mythology and beliefs and questions related to Latin American identity. They are the result, on the one hand, of the influences of a genre initially foreign to their authors and, on the other, of a series of cultural and historical realities that shaped the societal fears of their writers' generation.

Without aiming for a deep analysis of recent Mexican social history, I would like to point out a number of incidents and social situations that are reflected in the Gothic science fiction of the territory. Javier Ordiz (2014) mentions the economic crisis, the political situation and the environmental degradation as the three main traits of Mexican anxieties, which evoke a pessimistic image of a decaying, corrupted and ruined Mexican future. According to Ordiz, the general impoverishment of the population that followed the neoliberal government of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) led to the devaluation of the national currency, a rise in the unemployment rate, poverty and social inequality (1048). This social situation is reflected in the portrayal that Mauricio Molina in *Tiempo lunar* (*Lunar Time*) offers of a futuristic Mexico City, which becomes a terrifying landscape of ruins and decay where anyone can disappear without a trace. The economic crisis is more categorically reflected in Homero Aridjis's

[2]" Nuestro país McOndo es más grande, sobrepoblado y lleno de contaminación, con autopistas, metro, tv-cable y barriadas. En McOndo hay McDonald's, computadores Mac y condominios, amén de hoteles cinco estrellas construídos com dinero lavado y malls gigantescos." My translation. Consecutive versions in English will also be.

description of the poor urban slums of futuristic Mexico City in the novel *La leyenda de los soles* ("The Legend of the Suns", 1993). These two novels, along with the cyberpunk fiction *La primera calle de la soledad* ("The First Street of Solitude", 1993), by Gerardo Horacio Porcayo, provide a staunch critique of a system where political authority equals economic power and "Caudillismo", or selfish leadership, is still being practiced. These themes, while bringing to mind contemporary concerns about the current world order, are also deeply rooted in Latin American reality (Kreksch 178). The prospective city that these authors draw is also highly polluted, suffering from continuous acid rain and covered in smog as a reflection of the contamination problems that the city has been registering for the past sixty years. Impoverished, contaminated, decaying, governed by monstrous individuals, the future version of Mexico becomes a terrifying projection of present fears.

Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz also comments on the powerful vision of destruction and insecurity that the earthquake hitting Mexico City on September 19th 1985 projected. Just as the killing in Tlatelolco had done two decades before, the earthquake generated a dreadful consciousness of disaster and uncertainty that necessarily marks the writing of the younger generation of Mexican writers (Trujillo Muñoz). These authors are witnesses to the catastrophe which changed the urban landscape of the city into a scenery of devastation that is accurately portrayed by some of their future imaginings.

The Gothic mode plays a very significant role in this dystopian imagination as, for example, the dark atmosphere that haunts the future ruins of the city portrayed by these authors. In *Tiempo Lunar* (2005), Mauricio Molina describes Mexico as a "ruined corpse" (25) where nothing grows because even the land is dead (28) and the streets are "impregnated with an uncanny nightmarish atmosphere" (80). Even when the protagonist turns to the television as a means of escaping his terrible reality, all he finds is a frightful replica of his own terrifying world:

> The screen showed dry and cracked lands, covered in human bones, cattle skeletons and people suffering from skin and eye infections. These images alternated with fixed shots of the sun … The image of that huge infected orange slowly disappeared and the hungry and sick crowd returned, covered in abscesses, with their abdomens hideously swollen, their eyes dull as dried figs. (49) [3]

In *Tiempo lunar* horror is everywhere, both in the real and in the artificial world, both in the streets of Mexico City and in the loneliness of the main character's daily life. The terror it evokes, however, lies in the reader's recognition of some of these disturbing images as a potentially accurate depiction of the present. Aridjis introduces a similar portrayal of a decaying metropolis where people strive to survive through their (un)lives; the inhabitants of Mexico City are often described as ghosts, their bodies as cages, while the subway is a rolling coffin and the dead trees sinister skeletons (94, 74, 32, 132). The reality which works as a portal to the oneiric world of the cybernetic in *La primera calle de la soledad* is also portrayed as rotten, gloomy, treacherous, dominated by untruthful corporations and corrupt religions; it is only though machine-made electric dreams, the new type of consumer goods, that the population can try to escape the horror of their real lives.

I believe, however, that the most appealing Gothic feature of the three dystopic fictions is the way in which they toy with the conception of time. Having lost some of the social achievements of their ancestors, the humans on futuristic Earth imagined by the novels find themselves in a situation of social devolution that brings back, while projecting forward, the barbarism of the past. This idea is emphasized by Dani Cavallaro's depiction of cyberpunk and its relationship with time, which can also be extrapolated to describe the three fictions being

[3] "La pantalla mostraba campos áridos y agrietados, sembrados de huesos humanos, de esqueletos de ganado y gente con infecciones en la piel y en los ojos. Estas imágenes se alternaban con tomas fijas del disco solar … La imagen de aquella enorme naranja infectada se disolvía y volvía La muchedumbre hambrienta y enferma, cubierta de pústulas, los vientres monstruosamente abultados, los ojos opacos como higos secos."

analysed in this paper. According to the author, these types of fiction stress "that the present does not bear witness to the triumph of reason because it is inextricable from past values and beliefs, including superstitious ones" (176). Past barbarism is reflected in future violence; the projected remains of extreme religious cults and the strong presence of pre-Hispanic beliefs are the main features that elaborate the complex, interdependent correlation between past, present and future. This intricate interconnection necessarily evokes the one constructed by the literature of terror. Hence, David Punter affirms that "The code of Gothic is thus not a simple one in which past is encoded in present or vice-versa, but dialectical, past and present intertwined, and distorting … each other with the sheer effort of coming to grips" (198). The dystopian imagination of Science Fiction adds a future dimension to this scheme, as the prospective scenarios are nothing but a distorted image of present concerns, an "*exposure* of social reality in inverted form" (Cavallaro 171) in the most Gothic of senses. In *Tiempo lunar, La primera calle de la soledad* and *La leyenda de los soles,* "[t]he otherness of both the past and the future keeps on infiltrating the present with the obstinate regularity of a repetition compulsion, turning time and space into settings for the confrontation of ungraspable absences" (Cavallaro 167). Moreover, what lies beneath these distorting representations of Gothic Science Fiction is the representation of monstrosity, coming back from the barbaric past, collecting present anxieties and projected into a grotesque future. As Fred Botting asserts, "the future is not what it used to be" (150).

The three hideous imaginations of the future which the three novels put forward could be considered as science fiction dystopias in the sense that they work as "cautionary satires that critique the current order" (Booker and Thomas 72). Each one of them, however, belongs to a different science fiction subgenre: while *La leyenda de los soles* is manifestly apocalyptic, *Tiempo lunar* deals with a ruined post-apocalyptic reality and *La primera calle de la soledad* is believed to be the first cyberpunk novel of the Mexican territory. None of the novels,

however, represent these subgenres as pure, unadulterated categories, as elements from other literary modes interact with the science fiction workings of these literary hybrids.

Myth mingles with fantasy, science fiction and Gothic atmospheres in Homero Aridjis's novel *La leyenda de los soles.* In a decadent Mexico City in 2027, the human beings are struggling to survive in a world of pollution, epidemics and corruption, surrounded by death and putrefaction. The political leaders of this terrifying future are thieves, sex-offenders and murderers who have allowed for the destruction of Nature to defend their own particular interests. The result is a dying world with no forests, no wild animals and no water, constantly shaken by continuous earthquakes, where the citizens live terrified and terrorized by those in power.

Aridjis chooses a theme that has been haunting the consciousness of civilization from its inception, and that seems to be especially present in the contemporary dystopian films of many countries. The different ends of the world that have been portrayed in film and literature throughout the last decades have successfully given a monstrous shape to a series of historical and social concerns: humanity's misuse of weaponry, world wars, atomic bombs, the return of ancient monsters, the spread of dreadful viruses or the coming of the Antichrist; the fictional imagination all around the world has created an extensive imagery of possible apocalypses. Aridjis takes upon this universal theme and imbues it with concrete anxieties about the political corruption of Mexico and the precarious situation of the environment due to the pollution of its cities. The moment when Earth cannot tolerate any further pollution and the social structure of the cities is so deteriorated that its inhabitants are more dead than alive coincides, in Aridjis's narrative, with the eve of the New World. According to Aztec beliefs, four suns, or ages, existed before ours, each of them ending with a natural disaster. In *La leyenda de los soles,* as the Fifth Sun dies, the contemporary age sinks in its own agony of corruption and pollution as the key human ulcers of the 20th century.

The social critique that the novel draws is mainly articulated though the figures of the President of the Republic, José Huitzilipochtli, and the Chief of Police Carlos Tezcatlipoca. These are the two deities in the Aztec tradition customarily opposed to Quetzalcóatl, god of peace and the Arts. The god Tezcatlipoca is associated with the Kingdom of Death, darkness and temptation, and his personification in Aridjis narrative is a corrupt, bloodthirsty chief of police who finds recreation in kidnapping, raping and assassinating female teenagers. Huitzilopochtli also incarnates yet another powerful figure which is intrinsically Mexican: that of the *macho chingón*, an unprincipled and powerful man that holds great power. According to Octavio Paz, "[t]he *macho* commits *chingaderas,* that is, unforeseen acts that produce confusion, horror and destruction. He opens the world; in doing so, he rips and tears it, and this violence provokes a great, sinister laugh" (81). Aridjis connects this figure and the hopeless situation of Mexico with the extreme liberalism that dictated the country's politics during the last decades of the past century (Ordiz 1053). Thus, Tezcatlipoca's plans for the future consist in creating a neo-liberal heaven, with a city with no poverty, no large families, criminals, prostitutes or homeless people, built around high office blocks and a shopping centre with luxury boutiques and stock exchanges made of high-priced glass (Aridjis 159-160).

A critique to capitalism, Nahuatl myth and Gothic imagery are brilliantly put together in Aridjis's descriptions of the apocalypse. Carlos Tezcatlipoca only wears black and lives in a sinister house full of mirrors that the visitor needs to avoid looking into. The mirrors, acting as a reference to the Nahuatl myth of the flight of Queztalcóatl,[4] emanate a powerfully mystifying force that turn Tezcatlipoca's mansion into an Aztec Gothic castle:

> On the edge of the tall black stone walls which surrounded the general's house there was a deep rift. The house itself was a work of hallucination, with its black roof, its

[4] The myth has many variables, but they all coincide in describing the flight of Queztalcoatl from the town of Tula, which he had founded, after seeing his own misdeeds reflected in Tezcatlipoca's mirror. The looking glass is also the symbol of Tezcatlipoca himself: his name in Nahuatl translates as "Smoking Mirror."

> walls made of volcanic rock, its stone balconies opening onto closed walls, its inaccessible doors and windows, its stilted arches with no base, just floating in the air, the door full of mortises made to look from the inside without being seen. And up, on top of everything, the statue of the goddess Coatlicue. (106)[5]

The moral and ecological end of the world that takes place in the city comes together with a horrific invasion of the beasts of the Mexican past: while the violent ghosts of Spanish conquistadores take to the streets followed by the *cihuateteo* (sinister spirits of the mothers who died when giving birth), the *tzitzimime* (dreadful demons of darkness) start attacking the population. These monsters have grotesque features like powerful claws, hairy faces and legs, unnaturally big phallic extremities rolled around their waists and other bizarre animal-like characteristics, and can invoke malformed creatures while drinking blood and raping men and women.

The future world that Aridjis imagines conjures up the monsters of the Mexican past, while offering a staunch critique of liberal economy that necessarily mirrors late twentieth-century and contemporary concerns. The mélange of past, present and future in the novel is made explicit by means of the invitation to recognize as current the social and environmental problems of a prospective society. Ancient myth is transformed into future monstrosity invading an agonizing reality which is potentially our own. The narrative is, thus, historically, culturally specific and global at the same time, shaping one of the most appealing examples of Mexican Gothic dystopia.

Tiempo lunar, as introduced before, is also set in a decadent and terrifying Mexico City. This time, however, the story takes place in an uncertain future that suggests a post-apocalyptic

[5] "Al borde de los altos muros de piedra negra, que rodeaban la casa del general, estaba una profunda barranca. La casa misma era una obra de La alucinación, con sus tejados negros, sus muros de tezontle, sus balcones de piedra que daban a paredes cerradas, sus puertas y ventanas inaccesibles, sus arcos volados sin soporte que descansaban en el aire, la puerta llena de escopladuras, para mirar desde dentro sin ser visto. Y arriba, muy arriba, la estatua de la diosa Coatlicue."

reality; great areas of the city are mostly ruins, and the rest were evacuated for a series of unexplained circumstances. The narrative is also presented as a fusion of supernaturalism, science fiction and a *noir* atmosphere, imbued with a Gothic urban claustrophobia and overwhelming sense of loss. Some of the elements of the narrative function as an homage to the genre of the *roman* and *film noir*, like its lonely but tough protagonist always dressed in a gabardine coat, the mysterious *femme fatale* and the dark and hopeless description of the social and political reality. The novel's main focus is directed towards supernatural forces reflecting the past of Mexico rather than dealing with future technology and cybernetics so, despite the *noir* aesthetics, it cannot be entirely labelled as cyberpunk.

This science fiction hybrid also reflects contemporary concerns about the environment, the excessive power of the political and military sphere and the overpopulation of the city. The mistrust in the authorities is combined with other contemporary societal concerns such as pollution or epidemics in the description that Molina offers of Mexico City's future:

> For several years, broad regions of the city had been evacuated due to superior orders. Multiple reasons, never entirely clarified, were mentioned: pollution, flooding, risk of landslides, epidemics. Some of these territories were guarded by soldiers; others had been abandoned to deteriorate. Nobody knew exactly what the real cause of the evacuations was. It was known that contamination and demographic saturation had provoked grave problems in the past, but the true reasons were never revealed and the population obeyed the governmental orders. (23)[6]

Using a *noir* format, inherited from the great literary and cinematographic fictions of the American Fifties, Molina imbues his narrative with a series of specifically Mexican concerns.

[6] "Desde hacía años grandes regiones de la ciudad habían sido evacuadas por órdenes superiores. Se aludían múltiples razones nunca completamente aclaradas: contaminación, inundaciones, peligro de derrumbes, epidemias. Algunos de estos territorios estaban custodiados por soldados; otros habían sido abandonados al deterioro. Nadie sabía a ciencia cierta cuál era la causa real de las evacuaciones. Se sabía que la contaminación y la sobresaturación demográfica habían provocado en otras épocas muy graves problemas, pero las verdaderas razones nunca fueron reveladas y la población acato las órdenes gubernamentales."

This hybrid construct also contains some appealing references to pre-Hispanic myths about the foundation of Mexico City.

The Mexicas, the ancient population of Mexico, are thought to have migrated from their original settlement in Aztlán, an island said to be surrounded by a lake. These peoples finally established their settlement around another lake in the valley of what is Mexico City nowadays. One of the numerous theories around the origin of the name "Mexico" explains it as being composed of three parts: "meztli" (moon), "Xictli" (belly button, centre) and "co" (place) (Heyden 13). Mexico City would be, then, in the "centre of the moon lake." The main character of *Tiempo lunar* faces an ominous version of this origin of Mexico at the end of the mysterious trip that takes him through an almost supernatural metropolis. Through the sewers of the metropolis he reaches a ruined city covered by a giant lake. The description of the place suggests the presence of a pre-Hispanic past flooding the contemporary urban landscape:

> In the shores [of the lake] one could see oxidized vehicles shining under the burning look of the moon like crocodiles, barb wires, leaning pylons. Nothing could alter the savage and primitive quietness of the place. Andrés could hear the millennial silence of the night." (126-7)[7]

The references to the moon, as an intrinsic part in the alleged naming of Mexico, appear throughout the book, and are particularly embodied by the figure of the *femme fatale* of the narration: Milena has a beauty mark in one of her thighs that becomes the obsession of the protagonist, and she is menstruating during their last encounter. Both the word *lunar* (Spanish for "beauty mark") and the word "menstruation" are etymologically related to the moon.[8]

[7]"En las orillas se veían vehículos oxidados brillando bajo la mirada calcinante de la luna como cocodrilos, ramajes de alambres de púas, postes inclinados. Nada alteraba aquella quietud salvaje y primitiva. Andrés podía escuchar el silencio milenario de la noche."
[8]*Menstruation* from Latin *menses* (month) derived from Greek *mene* (moon).

Water is also present in numerous allusions throughout the novel, mainly in the descriptions of the claustrophobic humidity of the city, the unremitting acid rain and the images of dark and putrid water flooding the metropolis:

> Suddenly he heard the noise of water springing up. Green, muddy water started coming out from the sewers, through the clogged channels … The green water pooled the subsidence of the churches and colonial buildings, the car parks and basements of the newest buildings. Part of the cathedral was submerged; the streets, unseen at that nightly hour, slowly turned into canals, as they used to be. The Zócalo already was a huge lagoon. (92-93)[9]

The past of Mexico City as a lake slowly emerges from the sewers in an ominous form, taking down both ancient and modern buildings. The recourse to the myth at the hands of Molina does not intend to explain the present, but to warn about the dangers of forgetting the past. The lake that was the original settlement for Mexico City inexorably comes back embodying destruction and evil, as an ancient monster that does not want to be forgotten. The drains of the city represent some of the most powerfully Gothic descriptions in the narrative. Once the hero crosses the manhole cover, he enters a confusing reality where distinctions such as up and down are irrelevant.

Even though the novel is essentially a piece of Science Fiction, there is no scientific explanation to the uncanny flooding of the city. The supernatural events are not called into question by the protagonist, and whether they are true or part of the character's hallucination remains unimportant. Molina presents a sense of supernaturalism as an essential part of human reality: the magic spaces that the main character visits, uncannily haunted by the mythical past

[9]"De pronto escuchó un ruido de agua que brotaba. De las alcantarillas, a través de las acequias cegadas, comenzó a salir un agua verdosa y turbia … El agua verde se acumulaba en los hundimientos de las iglesias y los edificios coloniales, en los estacionamientos y sótanos de las construcciones recientes. Parte de la catedral estaba hundida, las calles a esa hora que ningún ojo las miraba se iban convirtiendo en canales, como antaño. El Zócalo era ya una enorme laguna."

of the city, are also part of its authenticity. The protagonist acknowledges the existence of breaches in the rationalism of reality, "places surrounded by 'noise' and interference, islands in the ocean of natural laws" (110). Molina seems to be inviting us to the acceptance of this parallel mystical space, in a conclusion similar to that one drawn by Magical Realism, but with an essential ominous twist.

La primera calle de la soledad also echoes the aesthetics typical of film *noir* and, portraying life in a future reality ruled by high-tech, constitutes the best-known cyberpunk novel of the Mexican territory. The novel shows great intertextuality, referring the classics of the genre in North America (mainly Gibson's *Neuromancer*), introducing universal themes such as the *Frankenstenian* idea of the computer as rebellious monster, but also targeting specific Mexican concerns.

The future world which Porcayo portrays is dominated by corporations that commercialize a service known as "Electric dreams", virtual reality made indistinguishable from dreams built on the desires and yearnings of the user. The computer chosen to control the elaboration of electric dreams starts acquiring a human-like awareness of its own existence made from fragments of the consciousnesses of people using the service. The recently acquired personality of the machine transforms the cyberspace in yet another place controlled by superior entities and thus, easily controlled and transformed into nightmare.

The electric dreams are also used to torture individuals, elaborating cybernetic personal torments which target individual horrors. Like Burke's sublime, the matrix engenders terror and delight (Botting 149). Moreover, these customized nightmares evoke a sense of dreadful familiarity similar to the Freudian uncanny. The fears of the individual take a monstrous form that is, still, part of their own consciousness: although whatever haunts human experience "may seem alien, foreign and remote, is in fact *part of us*" (Cavallaro 168). For the protagonist, the horror of his dream made nightmare takes place in form of torture, when he is forced to witness

his tormentor raping the slowly dying body of his ex-girlfriend who ends up being only an abhorrent skeleton.

The dissolution of the human body such as this is yet another theme thoroughly explored by Porcayo. The slaying, piercing violence insistently executed against human flesh throughout the novel exemplifies a fascination for the dissolution of the imaginary integrity of the body, which, as in other Gothic Science Fiction narratives, "repeatedly invaded, penetrated, dissected, dashed, possessed, snatched, manipulated and controlled" (Botting 145). The main character himself, a human with artificial extremities, a synthetic eye and brain implants, represents a figure of uncertain nature. As a cyborg, he underscores "the intrinsic strangeness of the everyday, the ultimate uncanniness of anything we may deem familiar" (Cavallaro 54). He is, in Kristeva's terminology, an interstitial body of abjection.

The human-like qualities of the machine and the cyber-implants in the body of the main character raise questions related to the uncomfortable border between being and machine, necessarily inviting the reader to consider the concept of what it means to be human. If this disturbing subversion was not Gothic enough, both the future reality of the novel and the electric dreams turned into nightmare are so terrifying that they are often indistinguishable from each other; the protagonist and the reader find themselves in an atmosphere of terror and uncertainty where even the concept of reality loses its meaning and escaping becomes impossible.

These universal fears about the dissolution of the body and the reality behind the concept of humanity are brought into a Mexican context in Porcayo's novel. Unlike the novels of American cyberpunk, taking place in the powerful over-industrialized metropolis, *La primera calle de la soledad* takes place in a developing country which is undergoing cultural and economic colonization. It is the almost bankrupt Mexican enterprise Laboratorios Mariano that created the technology responsible for the electric dreams, but it is the American

corporation Artificial Intelligence Research (AIR) that finally invests in the project, with the main purpose of trying out their own brand new nanotechnology in the Mexican users of electric dreams. The economic hegemony of the United States is transformed, in the AIR's intentions, into technological expansionism and experimentation.

According to Muñoz Zapata, the key to understand the novel's connection to a Mexican consciousness lies in the two-folded perspective which the internal focalization of the text offers: "The cyborg vision in *PCS* demonstrates the double vision that Latin American societies acquired in the globalizing process of the cultural market" (195). The artificial eye is capable of seeing beyond the real world, entering an artificial reality built by a multinational corporation with a given ideology. The naked eye, on the other hand, "can observe the problem of adequacy and incompletion of the modernity project in the subcontinent" (196). Thus, the protagonist's twofold vision represents the double side of the globalization process in the continent, being technological and modernizing on the one side, but utterly insufficient, on the other. Zapata also mentions the presence of ghostly landscapes recalling Juan Rulfo's Comala and nods "to Octavio Paz's and García Márquez's discourses about Mexican identity and Latin American isolation" (200) as features connecting the text to its national origin.

Moreover, *La primera calle de la soledad* illustrates a complex conception of time, also present in *Tiempo lunar* and *La leyenda de los soles,* which links these novels both with the Gothic mode and with Mexican distinctiveness. The three narratives depict a cyclic notion of time which, as analysed before, coincides with the intricate intermingling of past, present and future in some of the contemporary Gothic fictions. Whereas one of the main themes of *Tiempo lunar* is the significance of the moon as an eternally repeated pattern, the Aztec myth that Aridjis refers to in his novel understands time as a series of cycles, each of them ending with the death of one sun. *La primera calle de la soledad,* conversely, presents a cyclic narrative structure that Muñoz Zapata compares to a kind of "ouroboros", a mythic snake eating its own

tail (190). As the author acknowledges, both the beginning and the end of the novel present references to this necessary rotation of life: "Everything is cyclical," reads the first page of the novel, "[l]ife, a set of repetitive acts. The journey, a stroll through a Möbius strip." (13).[10] The narration also ends with a similar reflection: "Life is a cycle. Never-ending and deceitful Möbius strip simulating movement and exploration to other dimensions" (192).[11]

This cyclic conception of time dwells in the necessity of recuperating the past as the only way of understanding a present that the novels project into distinct imaginary futures. According to Carlos Fuentes, one of the main theorists of Mexican time and identity, both past and future belong to the immediacy of the present in a country whose identity is a hybrid construction from different times: "Mexico is tender fortress, cruel compassion, mortal friendship, instantaneous life. All its ages fuse into one – the past that is *ahorita* – right now – as well as the future *ahorita* and the present *ahorita*" (175). Fuentes also acknowledges the essential importance of the pre-Hispanic past, as portrayed by the mythical allusions in *Tiempo lunar* and *La leyenda de los soles,* for a complete understanding of Mexican reality:

> Mexico is a multicultural, Spanish-speaking country, but it also continues to be an indigenous country as well. A whole repertoire of possibilities that we have forgotten, postponed, or expelled from our own concept of progressive time quietly awaits us in the indigenous world, repository of all that we have forgotten and scorned: the intensity of ritual, atavistic wisdom, mythic imagination, the death relationship, the method of marking the passage of time – narration and sum – not only in the calendar of the sun but in the calendar of destiny, the *tonopuhali* of twenty-day cycles, each one with its own discrete, thirteen-day unit. (249)

[10] "Todo es cíclico. La vida, un conjunto de actos repetitivos. El viaje, un deambular a través de una cinta de Moebius"

[11] "La vida es un ciclo. Eterna y engañosa cinta de Moebius que simula movimiento y exploración a otras dimensiones."

Aridjis, Porcayo and Molina's novels recognise this recurring feature of time by combining all times into their respective dystopian imaginations in a Gothic manner, where the past haunts a monstrous present projected into a decaying future. The intrinsic connections between the horrific scenarios imagined in the narrations are made explicit by references to Mexico City's overpopulation, political corruption, ecological degradation and the country's twofold relationship to technological and market globalization. Even though these narratives are set in the near future, it is the presence of the past that most insistently inhabits the narrative spaces: mythical past and barbarism collide in a world dominated by hideous corporations, uncanny technological monsters.

The combination of two literary modes such as Gothic and science fiction in a non-native territory like Mexico generates a postmodern hybrid both connected to the globalizing world that allowed it existence, and to the local realities that it reflects. Working together, these modes, while diverting from the realistic canon, illustrate the shifting abilities of the literary extraordinary to effectively mirror the cultural realities of a nation - yet in a grotesque, disquieting form.

Works Cited

Aridjis, Homero. *La leyenda de los soles.* Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1993. Print.

Armitt, Lucie. *Theorising the Fantastic.* London: Arnold, 1996. Print.

Booker, M. Keith and Thomas, Anne-Marie. *The Science Fiction Handbook.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print.

Botting, Fred. *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions.* London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Byron, Glennis. "Global Gothic."*A New Companion to the Gothic.* Ed. David Punter. Oxford: Blackwell, 2012. 369-378. Print.

Cavallaro, Dani. *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson.* London: The Athlone Press, 2000. Print.

Fernández Gonzalo, Miguel Ángel (ed.). *Visiones periféricas. Antología de la ciencia-ficción mexicana*. Mexico: Lumen, 2001. Print.

Fuentes, Carlos. *This I Believe.* Trad. Kristia Cordero. New York: Random House, 2005. Print.

Fuguet, Alberto and Sergio Gómez. *McOndo (una antología de nueva literatura hispanoamericana).* Barcelona: Grijalbo-Mondadori, 1996. Print.

Haywood Ferreira, Rachel. *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction.* Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2011. Print.

Heyden, Doris. *México: origen de un símbolo.* Mexico City: Colección Distrito Federal, 1988. Print.

Jackson, Rosemary. *The Literature of Subversion.* London: Methuen, 1981. Print.

Kreksch, Ingrid. “Reality Transfigured. The Latin American Situation as Reflected in Its Science Fiction.” *Political Science Fiction.* Eds. Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox.Columbia (SC): University of South Carolina Press. 173-182. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.

Luckhurst, Roger. “In the Zone: Topologies of Genre Weirdness”. *Gothic Science Fiction.* Eds. Sara Wasson and Emily Alder. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2011. 21-35. Print.

Molina, Mauricio. *Tiempo lunar.* Mexico City: Punto de lectura, 2005. Print.

Muñoz Zapata, Juan Ignacio. “Narrative and Dystopian Forms of Life in Mexican Cyberpunk Novel *La primeracalle de la soledad.*” *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film.* Eds. Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal. Jefferson (NC): McFarland & Company, 2010. 1888-201. Print.

Ordiz, Javier. “Pesadillas del futuro. Distopías urbanas en la narrativ amexicana contemporánea”. *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* XCI, 7 (2014): 1043-1057. Print.

Paz, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude.* Trads. Lysander Kemp (et al.). New York: Grove Press, 1985. Print.

Porcayo, Gerardo Horacio. *La primera calle de la soledad.* Mexico City: Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, 1993. Print.

Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror Volume II: Modern Gothic.* London: Longman, 1996. Print.

Rangel, Carlos. *The Latin Americans.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.Print.

Trujillo Muñoz, Gabriel. "“Novelas de ciencia ficción mexicana”." *Umbrales* 16 (1996): 4-8. Web. 13 May 2013.

Wolfe, Gary. *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature.* Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2011. Print.